

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

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The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851–1939

**Co-organized by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City
and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh**

Kansas City, MO and Pittsburgh, PA Aug. 12, 2011—*Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851–1939*, a groundbreaking exhibition of extraordinary objects representing the pinnacle of science and artistic ingenuity, opens at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art April 14, 2012, and runs through Aug. 19 of that year. It then travels to Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, from Oct. 13, 2012–Feb. 24, 2013. Many objects will be seen in the United States for the first time. A full-color catalogue, written by international scholars of the 19th and 20th century decorative arts and co-published by Skira Rizzoli, will accompany the exhibition.

Inventing the Modern World includes about 200 objects shown at every major and several minor world's fairs from 1851 to 1939, carefully chosen through a generous research grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibition is co-curated by Catherine L. Futter, the Helen Jane and Hugh "Pat" Uhlmann Curator of Decorative Arts at the Nelson-Atkins, and Jason T. Busch, Curatorial Chair for Collections and the Alan G. and Jane A. Lehman Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at Carnegie.





“We associate world’s fairs with fun, and also signature architecture like the Eiffel Tower and the Crystal Palace,” said Julián Zugazagoitia, Director & CEO of the Nelson-Atkins. “But the importance of world’s fairs was reflected in the objects that continue to inspire elegance and creativity. Now, for the first time ever, those objects have been brought together for this major exhibition.”

World’s fairs were the most important vehicle for debuting technological and stylistic advancements on an international stage. They functioned as showcases and marketplaces for design on a global, national and individual level. Above all, they democratized design unlike any previous or concurrent forum.

Lynn Zelevansky, The Henry J. Heinz II Director of Carnegie Museum of Art said, “The historical context of *Inventing the Modern World* embodies a vision that will be inspirational for

museum audiences across the country, and brings into play the capacity for inventive design in art, science and technology to improve the human condition and modern living.”

Due to the impermanence of the fairs, decorative arts from them are sometimes the only surviving elements. Decorative arts, particularly objects crafted in ceramic, metal, glass and wood, were the physical manifestation of the progressive ideals embodied in the fairs.

“We looked at literally thousands of decorative arts from around the globe,” said Futter. “We kept refining our choices to find the objects that really spoke about innovation. We are excited to bring them together for the first and only time to convey the sense of discovery and energy that these magnificent works at the fairs created.”

In order to compile the comprehensive list of breathtaking objects in the exhibition, Futter and Busch extensively investigated holdings displayed at world’s fairs throughout European and American public and private collections.

“The exhibition checklist comprises decorative arts unattainable as a group in any one museum in the world,” said Busch. “Objects were selected according to themes that resonate throughout *Inventing the Modern World*, including technique, cross-cultural influence and nationalistic inspiration, all of which shaped the competition inherent to the fairs.”

Visitors will experience *Inventing the Modern World* in an installation that evokes the spectacle of these highly popular events with chronological sections grouping fairs by periods over the late 19th and 20th centuries. Although every major fair through 1939 is represented, the exhibition is not a march through the fairs but an impressive grouping of objects illustrating the most engaging and forward-thinking innovations of their times. The exhibition will include works made by noted international artists and manufacturers, ranging from a monumental 1850s Gothic Revival cabinet to a 1930s streamlined Art Deco glass chair, to masterworks of jewelry and objects in glass, silver, and porcelain by such world-renowned artisans and designers as Baccarat, Tiffany, Cartier and Sevres.



After Kansas City and Pittsburgh, the exhibition travels to the New Orleans Museum of Art from April 14 to Aug. 4, 2013 and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina from Sept. 21, 2013 to Jan. 19, 2014.

Gilbert Rohde, American (1884–1944). *Vanity and Ottoman*, 1934. Painted white holly, red English elm, yellow poplar, mirrored glass, Bakelite and wool upholstery. Yale University Art Gallery, 1999.125.1.1-2.

Keller Frères, France (1881–1922). *Pitcher*, 1900. Gilded silver. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 997.119.1.

Jean-Valentin Morel, *Cup*, 1854–1855. Bloodstone (jasper), gold, enamels, emeralds, rubies, sapphires and cameos. 11 x 10 x 7 in. (27.9 x 25.4 x 17.8 cm). Indianapolis Museum of Art, Dennis T. Hollings Memorial Fund and the Robertine Daniels Art Fund in memory of her late husband, Richard Monroe Fairbanks Sr., and her late son, Michael Fairbanks, 2004.27.

Exhibition credit line: The exhibition has been co-organized by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Carnegie Museum of Art. In Kansas City the exhibition is supported by the Campbell-Calvin Fund and Elizabeth C. Bonner Charitable Trust for exhibitions.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest art museums. The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access and insight into

its renowned collection of more than 33,500 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings, photography, modern sculpture, and new American Indian and Egyptian galleries. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the Museum is a key educational resource for the region. The institution-wide transformation of the Nelson-Atkins has included the 165,000-square-foot Bloch Building expansion and renovation of the original 1933 Nelson-Atkins Building.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Streets, Kansas City, MO. Hours are Wednesday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Thursday/Friday, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon–5 p.m. Admission to the Museum is free to everyone. For Museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

Carnegie Museum of Art

Located at 4400 Forbes Avenue in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Art was founded by industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1895. One of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, it is nationally and internationally recognized for its distinguished collection of American and European works from the 16th century to the present. The Heinz Architectural Center, part of Carnegie Museum of Art, is dedicated to enhancing understanding of the physical environment through its exhibitions, collections, and public programs. For more information about Carnegie Museum of Art, call 412.622.3131 or visit our Web site at www.cmoa.org.

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